

Achievement Level Setting: An Inclusive, Balanced Process

Setting a new baseline for Common Core State Standards-aligned assessments

The **Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium** has developed a new assessment system aligned to the Common Core State Standards in math and English language arts/literacy. These new assessments will measure student progress toward readiness for college and careers.

One of the final steps of developing these new assessments was determining achievement levels that describe student performance. This fall, Smarter Balanced member states established these levels through a process called Achievement Level Setting. Levels were set in English language arts/literacy and mathematics across grades 3–8 and high school.

Through a series of online and in-person activities, educators, parents, and community leaders helped ensure the assessments are based on fair and rigorous expectations for students.

How does the Achievement Level Setting process work?

Step 1: Online Panel



Participants:

- Teachers and administrators
- Higher education faculty
- Business and community leaders
- Parents



Description:

Thousands of teachers and other interested parties reviewed test questions online and recommended the level of performance required for students to be considered on-track to college and career readiness.

Purpose:

The online panel allowed educators, parents, and other concerned citizens to have unprecedented input on achievement levels.

Step 2: In-Person Panel

Description:

States nominated educators, higher education faculty, and community members to participate in an in-person panel to deliberate and make recommendations on all four achievement levels. A diverse cross-section of teachers participated, representing grades 3-8 and high school in English language arts and math. Educators with experience teaching students with disabilities and English language learners also participated, helping ensure the levels accurately reflect achievement for all students.



Participants:

- Teachers and administrators
- Higher education faculty
- Business and community leaders
- Parents

Purpose:

The in-person panel allowed teams of educators and other stakeholders nominated by states to deliberate and recommend threshold scores for all four achievement levels for each grade and content area.

Step 3: Cross-Grade Review



Participants:

- A subset of representatives from the in-person panel



Description:

A cross-grade review committee (a subset of primarily educators from the in-person panel) met to review the suggested achievement levels and recommended any changes needed to ensure that the levels were aligned appropriately from grade to grade. In this way, teachers and parents can understand how students have progressed from year to year.

Purpose:

This step ensured that the achievement levels were appropriately aligned across grades and accurately reflect student progress from year to year.

Step 4: State Approval

Description:

Smarter Balanced member states and territory leaders will meet to review and endorse the achievement level recommendations. Higher education leaders will participate in decisions regarding the Grade 11 achievement levels to ensure that they reflect the expectations of colleges and universities. An independent Technical Advisory Committee and expert auditor will certify that the process used to arrive at these recommendations followed the plan approved by members. The achievement levels will then be subject to existing approval processes within individual states and territories.



Participants:

- Smarter Balanced member states and territories

Purpose:

This provides all students in Smarter Balanced member states and territories a clear, consistent measure of progress toward college and career readiness.

Step 5: Final Achievement Levels



In the Classroom:

The final product of this inclusive, collaborative process will be a set of new achievement levels on the Smarter Balanced assessments. Because Smarter Balanced members have set high expectations for students—and the new tests are designed to assess student performance against these expectations—the definition of grade level performance will be higher than it used to be in many states. Initial test results will represent a new baseline that provides a more accurate indicator for educators, students, and parents as they work to meet the rigorous demands of college and career readiness.



Learn more at www.smarterbalanced.org